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SEAN RASPET: Chasing a Dream and an Unalloyed Ethos – A Critic’s Pick in Brooklyn, An Embattled Utopia

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Arrive in Brooklyn, and you’ve entered the belly of contemporary art. It’s our 19th-century Paris or 18th-century Rome, with one of the largest concentrations of artists in the world. Here, you’ll find both commercial galleries and nonprofit and artist-run spaces – and thousands upon thousands of places you can visit during open-studio weekends scattered throughout the year.

Yet Brooklyn is an embattled utopia. In 2002 the artist Ward Shelley created a seven-foot-long timeline, now owned by the Brooklyn Museum, that set the “golden age” of Williamsburg in the early 1990s and its era of “consolidation and professionalism” around 2000. Now we’re in the artisanal cocktails-and-condominium afterlife.

It’s a well-known progression: Artists gentrify neighborhoods, only to be forced out by rising rents as these areas attract restaurants, upscale shops and people who covet the lifestyle rather than the studio space. That’s happening here, and some fear that even the artist-run spaces contribute to this process. (Martha Rosler reflects on the complicity of artists in that regard in her 2013 book, “Culture Class,” echoing observations by other veteran Brooklyn creative types, like the filmmaker Spike Lee.)

And yet, cognizant that despite its complications, Brooklyn is still a mecca, young artists continue to arrive, chasing the bohemian dream out to Bushwick and a handful of other neighborhoods. Here’s a selective gallerygoer’s guide...

CLEARING An updated version of the Arte Povera ethos and aesthetic can be sampled in the current group show at **Clearing**, a small commercial gallery with a branch in Brussels, which might be viewed as Europe’s Bushwick (versus Berlin, its Williamsburg). Works by **Jesse Stecklow**, **Nancy Lupo** and **Sean Raspet** employ materials like formica, hair gel and clocks, and the 3-D printing process. The exhibition uses the 1539 theft of a jewel-encrusted golden falcon fashioned by the Knights Templars of Malta for Charles V of Spain as an inventive springboard.